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HEART ATTACK AND FARMERS

Having recently written “So You Think You Are 10’ Tall and Bullet-Proof” I thought it might be timely to follow up on the other things I have learned.

Let me say at the outset I am not a doctor but hugely respectful of their profession. They are busy human beings just like you and I. They are trying to make decisions quickly in the 15 minutes allocated to you on your longevity.

It’s important that when we go to see them that we are honest about what’s happening so they can make a more informed decision, based on the information you supplied. Perhaps we could make a list of symptoms so we don’t miss any out at the appointment.

Some of the issues that I have learned are as follows:

Heart Disease

The name “Heart Disease” is probably, from a farmer’s point of view, a bad one. It probably includes many symptoms and effects. The most common “disease” is clogged blood vessels or water pipes, as from my last story. The clogging is called “plaque”. It builds up over time. It starts building up from when you are a child, and continues as we grow older. All those good roasts and fine living we have had probably contribute to it.

If you get under high stress levels it makes the blood vessels constrict (tightening of the water pipes). A piece of plaque may let go and may lift like a toilet seat and can block a pipe. A blocked pipe causes a heart attack or stroke, depending on whether it blocks the heart or lodges in the brain. It’s the deprivation of oxygen that does the damage or kills you.

It all sounds perfectly logical to us farmers doesn’t it?

If you get a partial blockage there may be enough blood flow to run your body until you have surgery. Signs could include pain to the shoulders and the chest and the arms. This is one of the first indications that you are in trouble. Identifying the signs, doing some self-diagnosis and going to your doctor and clearly describing the symptoms soon enough is really important. Pains might only occur when you exercise or exert yourself.

Stress ECG's

You can rock off down to your local GP and have a Resting ECG. A Resting ECG may show that you are fine and there is nothing wrong with you. That's when he puts you on a bed and wires you up and looks at the screen. But at this point you may really need to be asking for a Stress ECG. In a Stress ECG they wire you up, put you on a treadmill and make you exert yourself. In just a few minutes they can tell whether you are blocked up or not.

I heard of one fellow who was getting shoulder pains while surfing. He just went out and did it harder "trying to blow it out".

I was a bit the same. I probably knew I had a problem. I exercised harder, ate less but eventually realised I was in trouble too.

Admitting we are in trouble, we see as failure. It is not. The sooner we admit that we have a problem and go to our professionals the better the chance of survival we have. There are a number of cases where people have actually died between being diagnosed with blockages and having surgery. Identifying there is a problem and admitting it are the most important decisions we can make for ourselves.

Stents

If a blockage is identified you may be able to have a stent put in to open the passage up and let the blood flow through again. After convalescing you are probably away again. Thank goodness for modern technology and medicine.

Basically they put an entry into your groin and run some warm dye into your bloodstream. The blockages will then show up on the X-Ray screen. Once located a thin wire is then inserted into the groin (NO not No 8) and the stent is then placed in the blocked area. The stent is then expanded, and this pushes the blocked material back and allows the blood to flow freely. In other words the water pipes have been unblocked.

Now if you are beyond stenting it's a whole lot more difficult and more invasive and a whole new ball game.

Plaque and Blocked Pipes

It seems to me that plaque and blocked pipes is one of the main contributing factors to our problems. Our lifestyle, food intake and stress all contribute to higher cholesterol. It

seems that a diet high in fat (not necessarily) can start clogging us up at a very young age. We are apparently born with a cholesterol level of about 1 and it just seems to build up to the 5's, 6's and 7's with some people as high as 10. If your doctor recommends taking cholesterol reducing drugs then do it. I didn't. I thought it was a sign of weakness having to take cholesterol reducing drugs, and Lipex didn't agree with me so I stopped. I understand you can literally starve yourself and your cholesterol will only drop a little bit, so we then have to resort to taking tablets to reduce the cholesterol levels in our blood.

Lipex

This is the most prescribed drug in New Zealand. For some it works brilliantly. It reduces the cholesterol level with little or no side effects. For others, like me, it's horrid. Symptoms include:

- Heavy legs; Sleepiness; Nausea; and So on.

But there is a solution. You need to go back to your doctor and insist that the effects on you are bad. Your GP can then apply to the Government for a number. This number allows you to be put on "Lipitor" which I found to be much better with no side effects at all.

The reason that "Lipex" is the most prescribed drug is that's cheaper for the Government. Say no more. So, if the "Lipex" is not working insist on changing to another drug.

And talking about drugs, it's not really a drug is it? It's a cholesterol-reducing tablet.

Acidity

As farmers we understand pH and acidity in the soils, in detergent, in the milk and so on. I had a brilliant lecturer at Lincoln College who lectured on animal physiology but always related it to humans. It seemed to me on further reading that an acidic blood and bloodstream tends to favour plaque build-up. It appears that the acidic bloodstream is generally short on magnesium, and sometimes calcium. We supplement our cows with magnesium. Should we be supplementing ourselves? Many farmers take zinc to ward off infection and selenium to ward off cancer, prostate and heart disease. Maybe we should be taking magnesium as well.

Food

It appears that we should be careful with the food that we are consuming. Acidic type foods include:

- coffee; red meat; fast foods; sugary foods; and so on.

Apparently fruit and vegetables and whole grains and plenty of water are alkaline or neutral. I have heard it said that if you're not eating what your grandparents ate then you may be in trouble.

Summary

In summary we need to understand all this stuff.

We need to:

- think about our lifestyle and diet;
- put more full stops in our day;
- understand the symptoms and push to get the appropriate treatment;
- be aware of what may be blocking our pipes and do everything we can to keep them open;
- realise that if the toilet seat lifts in the bloodstream it could kill us; and
- avoid this happening because life is short enough.

We need to be more aware and think about a bit of self help to assist our overloaded doctors. However remember you are not a Doctor, so do not assume you know how to diagnose yourself. If you have concerns see your GP or Health Professional, and insist on a proper investigation.

So Heart attacks and Farmers is a big issue. We need to take a realistic approach to staying alive.

Remember we are not 10' tall and bullet-proof

These are the opinions of Don Fraser of Fraser Farm Finance. Any decisions made should not be based on this article alone and appropriate professional assistance should be sought.

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